

# Priority Schools: Reaching for Excellence



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Dear Michigan Educator,

One of the most profound professional opportunities of your career is before you. The work associated with school transformation is challenging, exciting, and deeply meaningful. Done well, it becomes a success story that inspires, informs, and—most significantly—alters the course of many learners’ lives.

If you are like most educators, you see a strong moral purpose in what you do. You are passionate about learning, and deeply dedicated to doing what is right for students. As you engage in transforming your Priority school, your commitment to student and school success will become more meaningful in ways you’ve never imagined. And every step of the way, MI Excel is with you, offering the tools and supports you need for the journey.

MI Excel assists transforming schools and districts by assembling experts who can help your team set a course to accelerate successful change. These professionals help you as you engage in deep conversations about data, explore effective school and district practices, and adopt the kinds of district system-level changes necessary to rapidly improve achievement.

You are asked to collaborate with your colleagues as you develop the systems and structures that support student learning in your Priority school and district. Through MI Excel, your voice and experiences are added to a larger statewide and national conversation about academic performance growth. Ultimately, it is our hope that educators begin to share both a mindset and a common language of improvement that will transform our passion into powerful, lasting results for learners.

Best wishes as you begin your work,



Mike Flanagan  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

***As you engage in transforming your Priority school, your commitment to student and school success will become more meaningful in ways you’ve never imagined.***



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# Reaching for Excellence

**There is no question that Michigan's Priority schools have the power to improve. What they need are the right tools, strategies, and resources.**

As Michigan's statewide system of support, MI Excel helps Priority schools and districts develop local, effective solutions for deep, systemic growth.

## *What is MI Excel?*

MI Excel is a system of support that offers technical assistance and capacity-building for schools and districts as they transform.

Today's MI Excel supports take the form of customized interventions that bring the best tools and resources to educators across the state.

MI Excel ensures Priority schools and districts receive the finest state and regional expertise available. A network of knowledgeable partners works in tandem with local leaders, guided by the conviction that student achievement increases when schools and districts:

- Understand the needs of the students they serve;
- Ensure instruction is customized to the needs of learners;
- Work together to build effective systems that ensure flexibility, resources, and support for students and adults alike.

**MI Excel employs focused, diagnostic approaches to improving student achievement that seek to thoroughly understand and support the needs of students, staff members, and communities in ways that foster excellence for all.**

In this publication, Priority schools and districts can enrich their understanding of the approaches, strategies, and supports available through MI Excel during 2013–14. Applicable tasks and time frames are described, along with suggestions for further reading.

# Core Beliefs

The hallmark of Michigan's accountability structure is its consistent focus on the needs of learners. MI Excel partners believe:

- Each and every child can learn at high levels.
- Regardless of the challenges schools may have, schools are ultimately dedicated to delivering strong achievement results.
- The work of improving schools is both imperative and urgent.
- We must honor and build upon the skills, knowledge, and experiences of the professionals working in our schools and districts.
- MI Excel provides guidance and assistance, but it is school and district educators who engage in the real work of change. Schools and districts will always bear the primary responsibility of improving themselves.
- Substantial, lasting improvement comes from the coherent, ongoing use of professional learning and discussion, data-based inquiry, and targeted support.
- MI Excel will maintain the highest standards of excellence, care, competence, and reliability.

## *SRO Requirements & Timelines*

All Priority schools must submit a reform/redesign plan that includes one of four federally defined intervention models:

**Transformation:** The district addresses four specific areas, among others:

- 1) developing teacher and school leader effectiveness, which includes ensuring the principal has the skills necessary for implementing transformation;
- 2) implementing comprehensive instructional reform strategies;
- 3) extending learning and teacher planning time and creating community-oriented schools; and
- 4) providing operating flexibility and sustained support.

# A Framework for Change

MI Excel, functions as part of a broader framework designed to grow achievement among all schools. State and federal accountability structures, resources, and requirements provide the path and tools necessary for schools to improve.

In Michigan, the work of advancing student achievement is a highly customized activity in which each Priority school's local context and needs are accommodated. This tailored approach allows MI Excel to support the objectives of the State School Reform/Redesign Office (SRO), complement the work of intermediate school districts and regional educational service agencies (ISDs/RESAs), and support the involvement of other agencies as appropriate (e.g., the Educational Achievement Authority [EAA], charter school authorizers).

Through MI Excel, school improvement activities and supports are all aimed at a single outcome: transformation. When deep change occurs in the school and district with the buy-in and support of staff, students, and community members, the promise of lasting student performance gains can become real.

**Turnaround:** This includes, among other actions, replacing the principal and at least 50 percent of the school's staff, adopting a new governance structure, and implementing a new or revised instructional program.

**Restart:** The school district closes the school and reopens it under the management of a charter school operator, a charter management organization, or an educational management organization selected through a rigorous review process. A restart school is required to enroll, within the grades it serves, any former student who wishes to attend.

**School closure:** The district closes the school and enrolls the students who attended that school in other high-achieving schools in the district.

These plans can draw upon data from the online ASSIST school improvement plan portal established by MDE and AdvancED.

## The State School Reform/Redesign Office

The State School Reform/Redesign Office (SRO) was created in 2010 and is under the leadership and general supervision of the Michigan State Superintendent of Public Instructions. Priority schools are placed under the supervision of SRO as a result of being identified as the lowest-performing five percent of schools in the state. Priority schools are required to submit redesign plans that include one of the four school intervention models identified by the federal government. These are described in the box below.

SRO reviews and approves schools' redesign plans and provides technical assistance to Priority schools to support implementation of the plans. For schools that receive Title I funds, MI Excel also is available to help leverage lasting change.

Districts have 90 days to complete the initial submission of the reform/redesign plan for the Priority school. SRO has 30 days from this date to review and approve appropriate plans, or provide feedback to disapproved plans. A revised plan must be submitted within 30 days of that feedback.

During the remainder of the school year, the Priority school may begin implementation, begin making the required staffing changes, or proceed with data collection.

Priority schools that do not make satisfactory progress or have an approved plan may be placed in the State School Reform/Redesign District (SSRRD). Priority schools placed in the SSRRD are subject to additional requirements including operation and management by the EAA. If the Priority school is a charter school, its authorizer may act to close the school.

## Title I Funding Requirements—Districts

Districts with Priority schools must set aside 20 percent of their Local Education Agency (LEA) Title I funds. These funds must be used for one or more of the following purposes:

**Option 1:** Support increased learning time.

**Option 2:** Implement or strengthen a multi-tiered system of supports that includes scaffolded instruction for English Language Learners (ELL) and Students With Disabilities (SWD), if the school's professional dialogue has identified this as a primary transformation strategy for improving school-wide performance.

**Option 3:** Procure professional learning for the staff aligned to the school's needs assessment, paying particular attention to the needs of SWD and ELL students as appropriate.

**Option 4:** Obtain a process improvement consultation for district system-level redesign in service of rapid school transformation.

**Option 5:** Provide release time for a teacher-leader from the Priority school to ensure school and district stakeholders receive technical assistance related to the school's reform/redesign plan requirements. The release time also permits the teacher-leader to incorporate elements of the Priority school's reform-redesign plan into the school and district

improvement plans during the planning year. Funds also can be used to hire a full-year replacement teacher for the released teacher-leader's classroom.

**Option 6:** Administer interim baseline assessments, which will supplement the district's universal screening assessment with additional diagnostic data and progress monitoring of student achievement.

## Title I Funding Requirements—Schools

In addition to the district set-aside, a school-level set-aside of 10 percent is also required for each Priority school. This funding must be used to support one of the school-level intervention options below. Funds must be used for any of the following purposes, aligned with the building's needs:

**Option 1:** Procure professional learning on implementation of strategies aligned to the data-derived plans for improvement or reform/redesign, including adoption of rapid transformation practices.

**Option 2:** Contract with a local ISD/RESA for a School Improvement Review.

**Option 3:** Provide time for teacher collaboration.

**Option 4:** Pursue culture/climate interventions, use of time analysis, or culturally responsive teaching interventions as needed.



*Through MI Excel, school improvement activities and supports are all aimed at a single outcome: transformation.*

### **Changes for 2013–14**

During 2012, the U.S. Department of Education granted Michigan an amendment to its waiver of various requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The amendment includes the following changes for all schools: Priority schools identified in 2013 must now send a letter to parents of students enrolled in the Priority school during the 2012–13 school year, or anticipated by the district to enroll in a Priority school in the 2013–14 school year, identifying the school as a Priority school. The letter must also communicate the reasons for the school's identification and describe the school's and district's plans to improve student achievement. Parents receive this letter no later than August 20, 2013.

In addition, the following changes apply to Title I schools and districts:

- Schools identified as Priority schools are no longer required to offer choice, transfer, and transportation options for students.
- Priority schools are no longer required to continue transportation for students whose parents had in past years chosen to transfer students under the choice/transfer option (districts and schools are encouraged to be sensitive to burdens this may place upon the affected families and students).
- Districts may elect to use Title I funds to provide or pay for the transportation costs of students choosing to attend a choice/transfer option school chosen for the 2013–14 school year, or a school already elected in prior years.
- Districts may determine the amount of Title I funds for elected choice/transfer and transportation based upon locally determined need and anticipated actual costs for transportation.

### **MI Excel: Expert Resources for Customized, Intensive Support**

MI Excel is focused on helping Title I schools and districts improve student achievement. To ensure the success of Priority schools in Michigan, a robust array of supports has been provided in partnership with state and national school improvement experts.

**Michigan State University Office of K–12 Outreach**, housed within MSU's top-rated College of Education, provides local support to schools and districts. The college's active network of top education experts has been working in the field for decades to promote lasting performance at all levels of schooling, and has deep capabilities in serving the needs of Priority schools.

Intervention specialists, trained and prepared by MSU, are assigned to districts to help them identify opportunities for transformation and growth, whether at the school or in the central office. Through data analysis and conversation, these specialists collaborate with district and school leaders as they identify system opportunities and undertake transformative strategies for advancing student achievement.

**Intermediate School Districts/Regional Educational Service Agencies (ISD/RESA)** also play an essential role in supporting Priority schools, and work in partnership with MDE and MSU. They provide school improvement facilitators (SIFs) to Priority schools, where they can work directly with school-based teams to support the development of redesign plans. SIFs also provide technical assistance to school teams as they revise their school improvement plans to reflect the instructional components of the redesign plan. Finally, these experts support the implementation of the redesign plan's instructional components.

The **Michigan Department of Education (MDE)** has forged a number of other strategic partnerships to actively deploy MI Excel, the statewide system of support. Major partners include the **Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA)**, **AdvancEd**, and **Education Resources Strategies (ERS)**. These strategic collaborations ensure customized, coherent support for school and district teams and provide access to high-quality information and resources.



# What Title I Priority Schools Can Expect

Districts with one or more Priority schools receive notification of their status prior to the commencement of the 2013–14 school year. Deep transformational activities begin at that time, with the assistance of state, university, and local educational experts all working together to support school and district change.

Schools that receive Title I funds are eligible for MI Excel support as they work to meet the expectations of the SRO. This support comes from coordinated resources deployed by MDE and its MI Excel partners. The specific nature of the work being undertaken through MI Excel differs by Priority school cohort, and is therefore presented by year.

## Year One

Year One Title I Priority schools and districts have access to the following coordinated resources, tools, and supports:

**MISchoolData.org:** Each MI Excel school receives a comprehensive picture of its performance, demographic, and perception data as a tool for beginning deep conversations about areas of strength, opportunity, and focus for future transformation efforts.

**Surveys of Enacted Curriculum (SEC):** MI Excel provides schools with a set of data collection tools to help them analyze the instructional content being delivered in their classrooms every day. Using SEC, schools can determine how well content standards are being taught and where changes are possible.

**ISD/RESA School Improvement Facilitator (SIF):** Working at the school level, the SIF facilitates the development of an annual ISD/RESA service plan in support of school transformation. The SIF also participates in deep conversations about school-level data and assists with the development of the local reform/redesign plan and related school improvement plan revisions. The SIF works closely with school leaders to pilot an Instructional Learning Cycle during the second semester in preparation for the coming academic year. SIFs also help school leaders interpret their SEC results and plan to implement their reform/redesign plan.

**MSU K–12 Outreach Intervention Specialist:** Working at the district level, each specialist facilitates deep conversations about the school’s data wall and assists the school in writing its reform/redesign plan. Following the timely submission of the reform/redesign plan, the specialist provides technical assistance to boost the capacity of the district to differentiate the support it provides its schools based on their unique individual needs.

The specialist provides support to the district in identifying systems changes designed to strengthen student achievement. The specialist facilitates the use of diagnostic tools to develop and incorporate responsive strategies into a revised district improvement plan. The specialist then provides support to district leadership to increase their capacity for implementing the plan.

**School Support Team (SST):** Maintaining a school-level focus, the SST consists of members external to the day-to-day operations of the school and provides on-site assistance facilitating transformation in Priority schools: an ISD/RESA SIF, a designated district representative from the central office, and an MSU K–12 specialist. Throughout years one and two, other team members, such as an Office of Field Services (OFS) representative from MDE, an SRO monitor, a content coach, and/or external providers, are added as applicable.

**Web-Based Resources:** Web-based resources, available at *mitoolkit.org*, are designed to provide district leaders with knowledge and practical how-to information as they strategically reallocate their resources to support their Priority schools. The Michigan Toolkit website features static and interactive tools and useful information from leading MSU K–12 experts, along with noted educational researchers, and national and local practitioners pertaining to achievement gap areas of special education, socioeconomic status (SES), English language learners (ELL), and ethnicity. Priority school leaders can access monthly articles on key topics related to these gap areas, and gain insights to approaches for eliminating gaps among subpopulations of students.



**Superintendent's Dropout Challenge:** If the Priority school is not already participating in this initiative, it must sign on as part of MI Excel. The Challenge requires the district to identify 10-15 students in all elementary, middle, and high schools who have multiple dropout risk factors and provide research-based supports and interventions. Through the process, MSU specialists and SIFs confer with and provide ongoing feedback to school and district leaders, as well as observe and report on school and district progress to inform partner efforts and MDE. This is an essential function of improvement work. It is important to note, however, that the primary role of specialists and SIFs is to facilitate supports for reform activities, not to monitor compliance efforts.

## Year Two

Year two supports are designed to sustain and build upon the tools and resources initially available during Year One. The School Support Team (SST) continues to work together on school and district improvement activities.

**ISD/RESA SIF:** Working at the school level, the SIF continues to facilitate the development of the local service plan, helps the school choose appropriate supports for its transformation efforts, and provides technical assistance with implementation and data collection/analysis. The SIF also becomes active in helping the school implement Instructional Learning Cycles (ILCs). ILCs are short cycles of improvement lasting two to four weeks that examine classroom-data on both the implementation and the impact of specific strategies on student achievement. The SIF meets with local teacher teams, the district representative, and MSU K–12 specialist to monitor the progress of the ILCs at least four times during the school year.

**MSU K–12 Outreach Intervention Specialists,** working at the district level, facilitate deep data dialogues as needed, based on the district's support of the school's improvement plans. Specialists also provide technical support to district-level systems changes. In addition, part of the function of the MSU specialist is to help customize and bring coherence to district support for each Priority school's improvement activities. As a member of the school support team, the specialist works closely with the district representative and the SIF to help coordinate an array of available supports.

As supports are provided during Year Two, MSU specialists and SIFs continue to confer and provide ongoing feedback to school and district leaders, as well as observe and report on school and district progress to inform partner efforts and MDE. This is an essential function of improvement work. Again, it is important to note that these professionals are not monitoring compliance efforts for the school. The primary role of specialists and SIFs is simply to facilitate transformation in support of increased student achievement for all.

During Year Two, Priority schools and districts can access additional MI Excel supports, according to their improvement strategies and needs. Specifically:

**Content Coaches:** Trained, ISD/RESA-deployed content coaches can help address the areas of need identified through school and district improvement plans.

**Professional Learning:** Development opportunities should align with school and district needs, and be high-quality and job-embedded when possible.

**Culture/Climate Intervention:** The introduction of strategies such as behavioral support systems, cultural competency building among staff and students, and other approaches may help support school and district changes.

**MDE-Approved Restructuring Model:** Approved educational service providers offer consultative support for local restructuring efforts. Year Two schools and districts may use this approach if it is appropriate to their local needs and improvement plans.

Priority schools and districts during Year Two and beyond will receive regular feedback to inform their progress. The SST, comprised of a district representative, specialist, and SIF, will consult regularly to ensure all strategies and interventions are achieving desired results. With a goal of deep, lasting systems change, these quarterly reporting meetings will be extremely important to ensure schools and districts remain on course.

***The role of MSU K–12 specialists and SIFs is to facilitate transformation, not monitor compliance.***

# Developing Effective Transformation Strategies

The MI Excel approach to cultivating deep, sustained improvement is structured, efficient, and well supported by research. It begins by engaging school and district staff in a series of in-depth dialogues about their own local data. These dialogues are conducted using a phased approach that ensures a thorough examination of a variety of data trends and ongoing, open discussion about what they mean. Through this process, school and district teams identify local needs and recommend strategies for meeting them.

Data dialogues provide a foundation for examining data. Once the first set of data dialogues has been completed, the school and district teams have a core set of “big ideas” to begin using in their planning processes. These big ideas are analyzed, prioritized, and used in the preparation of a very robust reform/redesign plan for submission to the SRO. The reform/redesign plan will include and expand on big ideas to enrich the school improvement plan required pursuant to Title I.

Once the necessary plans have been completed, MI Excel supports evolve into technical assistance and implementation coaching. As members of the school support team, the MSU specialist, SIF, and district representative work with school leaders on an ongoing basis as they make the deep, lasting changes necessary to boost learning for each and every student.

## Reform/Redesign Planning for Improvement

School-level data dialogues form a powerful basis for local leaders to use in developing the SRO-required reform/redesign plan. School and district teams use the knowledge accumulated through data dialogues to determine their transformational plan. They develop theories of action, consider resources, and develop solutions to key challenges.

Similarly, the information schools have provided to the state through AdvancED’s ASSIST portal also provides a resource for reform/redesign planning. Data, objectives, and strategies previously included in ASSIST for school improvement plans can be aligned with reform/redesign discussions and plans.

The timeline for submitting a school’s reform/redesign plan is relatively aggressive, reflecting the urgency of Priority school reform, but allows for solid team thinking at both the school and district levels. The plan is designed to emphasize school-level and district-level strategies for change. However, district leaders must be engaged in the process to further their thinking about district-level systems changes that support the plan in broad, important ways.

## Aligning Plans and Strategies

Following submission and SRO approval of the Priority school’s reform/redesign plan, the school must work within the ASSIST web portal to ensure its school improvement plans reflect all recent changes and updates. Following this critical step, the work of implementation can begin with the help of the MI Excel partners and supports (described earlier).

## District-Level Improvement

At the district level, however, more work is still needed to ensure the Priority school is effectively supported as it begins to execute its plans. A district-level data dialogue begins with the MSU K–12 outreach specialist, who brings a wide array of performance, perception, demographic, and process data elements to bear on the development/refinement of district strategies.

As the district begins to work on its systems changes and improvement plans, leaders will consider several major strategic alignments:

**School Funding:** It is important for district and school leaders to work together to ensure school resources are correctly matched with the needs of students, as identified through the local data conversation.

**Teaching:** Schools and districts must work to build a professional climate that is centered on the needs of students. Professional development and team building are essential.

**School Design:** In some instances, the organization of the school and district may be causing barriers to performance. District leaders must challenge themselves to re-imagine alternatives that are capable of boosting results.

**Instructional Support:** Districts must ensure the tools available for instruction (e.g., curricula, assessments, etc.) are fully aligned with school and student needs.

**Leadership:** School and district leaders may need additional support to ensure their effectiveness. Professional development and capacity building are essential for lasting transformation, and should be considered.

**Central Services:** Through this process, it is important to ensure district systems and supports match school and student needs. Changes may be required to streamline administration and support lasting improvement.

**Partnerships:** A variety of community-based, regional, or even private partnerships may be appropriate to meet student needs, particularly if school and district resources are scarce. This intensive planning time affords opportunities for exploring and establishing innovative family and community relationships.

Viewing data and improvement through each of these strategic lenses will support district leaders as they develop effective goals, objectives, and action plans for change. These ideas are all folded into a revised district improvement plan.

## A Robust Feedback Loop

Once established, Priority school and district plans are revisited on an annual basis to ensure their continued applicability and effectiveness. As new data are received, strategic shifts may be needed to ensure transformation efforts are rapid, appropriate, and lasting. Program evaluation tools will be used to assess effectiveness of initiatives so they can be adjusted as needed.

School and district leaders must be relentless in their efforts to keep all plans and activities on track and current. Each year, new data will be revisited and discussed using data dialogue protocols, with adjustments made and approved as needed.

## Attention to Achievement Gaps

Priority schools can benefit significantly from MI Excel's focused tools, resources, and strategies for closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. MSU K–12 specialists have access to a dedicated team of professionals equipped with knowledge and approaches for improving student achievement among frequently underserved populations (e.g., socioeconomic status, ethnicity, English learners, and special education).

Through the MSU Office of K–12 Outreach, Priority schools have access to professional development, high-quality tools and resources, and local consultation, all designed to enhance local success and eliminate gaps.





# How to Make the Most of MI Excel

The MI Excel improvement process is deep and transformative for schools and districts. Local leadership teams who have worked with MI Excel report high levels of growth in all of the following areas:

- Robust understanding and use of local data
- Confident identification of change strategies
- Effective team dialogue about difficult/contentious issues
- Relational trust, leading to healthy school and district cultures

## Optimize the School Support Team

MI Excel carefully matches, selects, and deploys MSU specialists and other regional, state and national experts to work with local school and district teams. The ways in which local leaders choose their team members should be no less thoughtful. Some team members will be selected by virtue of the positions they hold. During Year Two, the school support team becomes more actively engaged in the school's improvement efforts. The following key positions will naturally be involved in local SSTs:

- ISD/RESA SIF
- District representative from the central office
- Data coordinator, if applicable
- Curriculum coordinator, if applicable
- MSU K–12 specialist
- Content coach, if applicable
- SRO monitor, if applicable
- OFS consultant, if applicable

Other local team members are chosen based on less formal considerations. School improvement team members, teachers working in critical subject areas, and other respected staff members also have a role to play in this process. The school support team meets with teams of teachers and the school principal—they may include the school improvement team—to monitor the instructional learning cycle. Effective members of these teams have several common characteristics:

- **Resourcefulness.** Deep wells of knowledge and fortitude are needed to thoroughly explore problems and identify solutions that work.

- **Ability to listen.** Team members will learn to fully honor and understand the viewpoints of others.
- **Flexibility.** The MI Excel improvement processes have tension points built into them; team members must be capable of adapting to an unfolding process.
- **Commitment to student outcomes.** When it comes to a decision between a personal interest and student performance, the student must always win.

The professionals deployed through MI Excel can serve as valuable resources to local leaders interested in building healthy improvement teams.

## Scale Up a Multi-Tiered System of Support

### What is a multi-tiered system of support?

All learners have unique needs. A multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) is an integrated system of instruction, assessment, and intervention designed to meet the achievement and behavioral needs of all students by appropriately using a variety of resources, evidence-based strategies, and tools for growth.

Priority schools in Michigan have ample opportunities to develop their capacity for reaching all learners. It is essential for schools to build a clear and consistent framework that provides just-in-time support for students based on their level of need.

To support the development of a strong system of support, MDE and its partners make training, literature, and other resources available. These resources are listed on the following page.

### **Reaching and Teaching Struggling Learners Initiative**

strives to reduce the risk of dropout. Teams support students during their high school experience and foster a culture of high expectations. Team members share data, observations, and ideas with each other and their staffs as they work to create positive outcomes for students by addressing school improvement practices.

### **The Michigan Transition Outcomes Project (MI-TOP)**

facilitates the development of effective systems that help students with disabilities as they work to achieve postsecondary outcomes. The project supports effective transition practices to ensure all students with disabilities are prepared for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. MI-TOP provides mandatory professional development to transition coordinators around the state on an ongoing basis.

### **The Michigan Online Professional Learning System (MOPLS)**

is an online, interactive, user-driven program available to all Michigan educators who want high-quality professional learning options. MOPLS supports teachers as they deliver content and instruction aligned to the Common Core State Standards, and offers ways to engage students who struggle with key concepts in language arts and mathematics. Carefully reviewed resources aligned to the Common Core will help educators extend their understanding of key concepts and methodologies in both content areas. The program also features instructional examples that demonstrate alternative ways to teach the core content to students who are struggling, specifically students with disabilities.

MOPLS' *Assessment Selection Guidelines* module aids educator teams and assessment coordinators in the correct identification of students with the proper statewide assessment. This module acts as a primer for the MEAP assessment, providing users with detailed understanding of Michigan's assessments, the laws and policies that govern them, sample assessment items, and an interactive flowchart to help guide assessment decisions. Another module, the *Using and Interpreting English Language Proficiency Assessments (ELPA) Reports* program, is also available to teachers of English language learners (ELLs) who administer the ELPA. This module, supported with state funds, provides teachers with a complete overview of the assessment reports for the ELPA, starting

at the most basic explanations of language domains and score calculation and progressing to a walkthrough of the Student Data File. The program also presents videos, created in cooperation with five different Michigan regional educational service agencies and districts, showing how districts and schools use scores for student placement, program evaluation, and parent communications.

MDE also provides technical assistance to all schools based on Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives of English language learners and other criteria. Technical assistance and professional development incorporate webinars, video conferencing, web dialogues, annual conferences, and individualized meetings. The annual Special Populations conference also includes sessions for technical assistance and best instructional practices.

### **Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model Capacity-Building Professional Development Initiative**

was launched in 2009 with assistance from the Great Lakes East Comprehensive Center at Learning Point Associates, an affiliate of the American Institutes for Research. The purpose of the initiative is to provide sheltered instruction for trainers across the state that will improve the achievement of English learners, particularly in content-area classes. Since 2009, MDE has provided a statewide five-day professional development "train the trainer" model to a cohort of 20 educators per year in SIOP and Blueprint for Exceptional Writing (process writing). Each MDE trainer provides a four-day regional workshop in the summer to about 40–60 educators, and ongoing job-embedded professional development with model lessons, debriefing, and collegial visits.



## Utilize Content Coaching

**Content coaches add value.** Many schools and districts find that educational coaching makes a tremendous difference in their ability to help attain lasting change. Effective coaches bring to their work a mindset, a skill set, general knowledge about coaching and school improvement initiatives, and a specialized knowledge of the work they will be doing with those they coach. Through MI Excel, content coaches are available to support Priority schools as they work to boost achievement in targeted areas.

**Content coaches are comprehensively trained.** All content area coaches funded through Title I Regional Assistance Grants in the state of Michigan must complete Coaching 101, a training program developed by MSU K–12 Outreach to prepare educational coaches for their work with schools. Funded by a grant from MDE, Coaching 101 builds a professional knowledge base for all Michigan coaches. This program extends participants’s skills in effective coaching to support improved instruction and increase student achievement. After successfully completing Coaching 101, content coaches must then complete a series of online training modules developed by MDE in partnership with Michigan Virtual University (MVU). These modules are designed as virtual training in the basics of content coaching, data analysis, pedagogy, and multi-tiered systems of support. Successful completion of these modules ensures that individuals can be considered as content coaching support for Priority schools.

**Finding a coach.** The Michigan Coaches Registry—available mid-August at [www.coachesregistry.org](http://www.coachesregistry.org)—is an online searchable resource designed to connect Priority districts with available content coaches. The registry will catalog each coach’s current training and eligibility, serving as a tool to help districts verify that content coaches have completed all requirements and are eligible to service Title I Priority schools. School districts will be able to search the registry to find specific coach information by location/region, school type, specific content area, or name of coach. In addition to providing an archived record of coaches and their training details, the registry will also have a secure portal that serves as a job board system for school districts and eligible coaches. ISD/RESA representatives responsible for hiring content coaches will be able to register for a secure user account

and post content coaching job openings and needs in specific content areas. In addition to MDE’s prerequisites, each individual ISD/RRESA will be able to require additional hiring and eligibility criteria, structure, and other details about their postings. Eligible individuals seeking coaching positions can utilize the job board to find and apply for available openings.

## Dig Deeper into School Improvement

MDE has partnered with MVU to develop a series of online modules related to school improvement. These modules provide support to school teams in effectively implementing each component of Michigan’s Continuous School Improvement model (MI CSI):

- gather
- study
- plan
- implement
- monitor
- evaluate

These modules are available free of charge to all educators through Michigan Learnport ([www.learnport.org](http://www.learnport.org)).

## Tap into a MI-MAP Toolkit

MDE has developed a dynamic toolkit for school improvement in partnership with expert educators. MI-Map provides practical strategies and materials to shape, support, and sustain system-wide innovation and school improvement.

The MI-MAP kit contains over 300 easy-to-use practical strategies and activities within 47 topics to help support local transformation efforts. It’s free and available online at the Michigan Department of Education website at, [www.michigan.gov/mde](http://www.michigan.gov/mde). Click “Career and College Ready” tab on the left column, “School Improvement,” and “MI-Map.”

***MDE and its partners have created and gathered the best available resources to help Priority schools achieve their improvement goals.***



## Access the Teaching for Learning Portal

MDE has created a portal ([teachingforlearning.org](http://teachingforlearning.org)) that allows educators to efficiently interact with all aspects of the state's robust Teaching for Learning Framework. This framework supports effective instruction in challenging content across all grade levels and content areas.

The framework outlines 77 research-based Essential Skills (organized into 14 Fundamental Processes and three Core Elements) that can be learned, practiced, and utilized by classroom teachers to efficiently and effectively deliver

instruction. Certainly it is not the expectation that a teacher use all 77 Essential Skills in every lesson or every day, or even every week. Rather, the resources on the Portal website are meant to guide teachers in determining how to effectively match the Essential Skills to the content and learning objectives to which they are teaching in order to maximize student learning.

***Although Priority schools are being challenged to improve, they don't have to do it alone. MI Excel is here to help.***



# Communicating About Changes

Effective messaging, outreach, and documentation of project results are essential to leveraging the success of MI Excel. MDE and its partners have developed an array of necessary internal and external communication strategies and materials for Priority schools to use.

## Partner/Project Communications

As transformation activities in your Priority school unfold, it will be important to keep close ties with all members of the school support team. Here are some of the channels already in place to support effective dialogue:

**Periodic Reporting Meetings & Dialogues:** Naturally, much of the work planned for Priority schools will entail face-to-face meetings between teacher teams and SST members. Additionally, MSU K–12 specialists will have ongoing dialogues with central office staff regarding their work of supporting transformation in their schools. These sessions offer rich opportunities for learning, discussion, and action.

**Virtual Connections:** Specific tools and resources have been created to incorporate all stakeholders and supporting organizations in professional dialogue and learning. In an effort to maintain coherence among all partners, MSU K–12-deployed specialists are using stable platforms for communication, administration, and learning.

- **MI Toolkit.** Web-based resources, available at [mitoolkit.org](http://mitoolkit.org), are designed to provide district leaders with knowledge and practical how-to information as they strategically reallocate their resources to support their Priority schools. The Michigan Toolkit website features static and interactive tools and useful information from leading MSU K–12 experts, along with noted educational researchers, and national and local practitioners pertaining to achievement gap areas of special education, socioeconomic status (SES), English language learners (ELL), and ethnicity. Priority school leaders can access monthly articles on key topics related to these gap areas, and gain insights to approaches for eliminating gaps among subpopulations of students.

- **MDE Resources.** The Michigan Department of Education offers instant access to key training materials, memoranda, reports and updates at [michigan.gov/priorityschools](http://michigan.gov/priorityschools). Also included are Frequently Asked Questions and historical information.

**Training Events and Workshops** are held to address specific content areas and issues of concern.

## Staff Communications

As the process of change occurs in Priority schools and districts, strong internal communications are essential. School leaders, improvement team members, and others taking part in local transformation efforts must provide regular written and verbal updates to ensure changes are well understood and embraced.

## Communication with School Boards

One of the greatest challenges Priority schools and districts face is maintaining appropriate levels of communication with their school boards and communities. As public officials responsible for setting school policy and managing budgets, board members must be kept in the loop about the progress of Priority school transformation activities.

It is expected that boards will receive quarterly updates from the district pertaining to the progress of each Priority school's transformation efforts. These updates can help ensure that the board is able to articulate what is being done to rapidly improve local results.

***Ongoing and effective communication to and among all key participants, from partners to parents, is critical to successful school transformation.***

## Community Outreach

Upon learning that their local school has been designated with Priority status, many community members, parents, students, and others will be understandably concerned. It is reasonable for the school and district to receive inquiries from the media, policymakers, and others seeking to understand the meaning of this development. In response, Priority school and district leaders will need to develop a coherent, effective strategy for communicating about this change. The following four-step process outlined by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) will help Priority school educators craft and deliver appropriate messages about what's happening in their schools:

**Research:** The school first compiles all relevant information and results pertaining to the Priority school. MDE suggests using the individual school “look-up tool” available at [www.michigan.gov/priorityschools](http://www.michigan.gov/priorityschools) as a starting place for information about the Priority School designation. The school then considers each of the audiences with which it communicates and determines what those audiences will need and/or expect to hear. Pockets of support and opposition are also identified in an effort to proactively anticipate questions, concerns, and responses.

**Action Plan:** School communication objectives and strategies are identified in response to the research results. These strategies should strive to ensure all stakeholders understand what is next for the school, and support its future transformation efforts. Written materials (e.g., letters to parents, talking points, FAQs) are developed in anticipation of the public's thirst for information. MDE offers a template communication strategy based on the information in the “look-up tool” at [www.michigan.gov/priorityschools](http://www.michigan.gov/priorityschools).

**Communicate/Implement:** School and district leaders make every effort to execute the action plan as written.

**Evaluate:** The action plan should include various “check points” to see how communication messages and strategies are working. If necessary, adjustments are made to keep ahead of critical issues and events.

The National Education Association (NEA) has developed a Priority schools campaign to support educators as they work to engage the public. Available at [nea.priorityschools.org](http://nea.priorityschools.org), the campaign is designed to help NEA members team with parents, principals, community organizations, and elected leaders as they launch their transformation efforts.

## MI Excel's Commitment Continues

MI Excel's commitment to deep learning and change will become more and more evident as schools continue to engage in transformational work, even if their performance improves to the point where they are no longer “on the list.” Here is why:

Student assessments are administered in the fall, which means that the data used to identify schools are a year old. Moreover, the data used to determine the effectiveness of local interventions will also lag, making it necessary to ensure schools have the right information they need to be certain they're on the right track.

Recognizing that deep and lasting transformation takes time, MI Excel provides a multi-year support structure along with milestone expectations for change along the way. If practices and systems are to change in the way we imagine, it will likely take several years for these changes to take hold and bear fruit.





# Supplemental Reading List

## Data Use

Lipton, L., & Wellman, B. M. (2012). *Got data? Now what?: Creating and leading cultures of inquiry*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Peery, A. (2011). *The data teams experience a guide to effective meetings*. Englewood, CO: Lead + Learn Press.

Wellman, B., & Lipton, L. (2004). *Data-driven dialogue: A facilitator's guide to collaborative inquiry*. Sherman, CT: Mira Via, LLC.

## District-Level Change

Kaufman, T. E., & Grimm, E. D. (2012). *Collaborative school improvement: eight practices for district-school partnerships to transform teaching and learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Miles, K. H., & Frank, S. (2008). *The strategic school: making the most of people, time, and money*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

## Leadership Development

Ferguson, R. F., Hackman, S., Hanna, R., and Ballantine, A. (June 2010). *How high schools become exemplary: Ways that leadership raises achievement and narrows gaps by improving instruction in 15 public high schools*. Report on the 2009 Annual Conference of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University. Available for download at <http://www.agi.harvard.edu>.

Hess, F. M. (2013). *Cage-busting leadership*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Platt, A. D. (2000). *The skillful leader: Confronting mediocre teaching*. Acton, MA: Ready About Press.

Reiss, K. (2007). *Leadership coaching for educators: Bringing out the best in school administrators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

## Reducing Achievement Gaps

Cleveland, K. P. (2011). *Teaching boys who struggle in school: Strategies that turn underachievers into successful learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Ferguson, R. F. (2007). *Toward excellence with equity: An emerging vision for closing the achievement gap*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Jensen, E. (2009). *Teaching with poverty in mind what being poor does to kids' brains and what schools can do about it*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Murphy, J. (2010). *The educator's handbook for understanding and closing achievement gaps*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Parrett, W., & Budge, K. M. (2011). *Turning high-poverty schools into high-performing schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

## School Improvement/Transformation

Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2010). *Switch: How to change things when change is hard*. New York, NY: Broadway Books.

Mehta, J. (2012). *The futures of school reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Peurach, D. J. (2011). *Seeing complexity in public education: Problems, possibilities, and success for all*. Oxford, CT: Oxford University Press.

Stephens, D. B. (2010). *Improving struggling schools: A developmental approach to intervention*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Winters, L., & Herman, J. L. (2011). *The turnaround toolkit: Managing rapid, sustainable school improvement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

## Teaching/Instructional Improvement

City, E. A. (2009). *Instructional rounds in education: A network approach to improving teaching and learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Dougherty, E. (2012). *Assignments matter: Making the connections that help students meet standards*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.

Schmoker, M. J. (2006). *Results now how we can achieve unprecedented improvements in teaching and learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Schmoker, M. J. (2011). *Focus elevating the essentials to radically improve student learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

The MET Project (2013). *Ensuring fair and reliable measures of effective teaching culminating findings from the MET project's three-year study*. Seattle, WA: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

# Glossary of Terms

## Title I Priority School

According to the Michigan's 2012 ESEA Waiver, a Priority school is defined as being one which is among the lowest 5% of public schools in Michigan's Top-to-Bottom list. Title I Priority schools are identified Priority schools that receive targeted or school-wide Title I funds.

## BAA Top-To-Bottom List

The Top-To-Bottom Ranking (TTB) List is used to identify Priority schools and is provided by the Office of Evaluation, Strategic Research and Accountability (OESRA). Through individual student Z Scores, this tool averages each school's student achievement, improvement (year-to-year), and achievement gap. The resulting ranking is used to depict the overall ranking of Michigan's schools and select those in the lowest 5%, statewide.

## Data Dialogue

A primary roles of the MSU K-12 specialist is to facilitate a deep awareness and understanding of all relevant student achievement and school improvement data available for each Priority district and its associated schools. This process is termed a data dialogue, because it is an extended conversation that takes place about each school's data. The data dialogues follow a defined format, created by using three phases: 1) Activate/Engage, 2) Explore/Discover, and 3) Organize/Integrate.

## Content Coach

A content coach provides support for implementation of research-based instructional strategies as described in the School Improvement Plan. The majority of a coach's time will be spent working in classrooms with teachers (e.g., modeling, observing, co-teaching). The coach will also play a role in the analysis and utilization of student achievement data to impact instructional decision-making and therefore can be a part of professional learning communities. In this way, the content coach can help teachers learn to use data for instructional planning to positively impact student achievement. The content coach's role is nonsupervisory, separate and apart from the evaluative role of the principal or teacher's supervisor. Content coaches can be provided by ISDs if their use is identified as strategic in the school's reform/redesign and/or school improvement plans.

## MSU K-12 Outreach Intervention Specialist

MSU K-12 specialists are educators who have been highly trained to work with schools who are striving to improve student achievement. They bring to schools a host of knowledge skills, and resources that are invaluable to the school improvement process.

## School Improvement Framework

Michigan has a framework for continuous school improvement in all of its schools. The framework is research-based and identifies key factors that characterize high performing schools. The framework has five (5) main strands:

- Teaching for learning
- Leadership
- Personnel and professional development
- School and community relations
- Data and information management

The school improvement framework provides a starting point for the extensive process of improvement that is taking place in Priority schools, and can serve as a model for other schools as they undergo improvement.

## School Improvement Plan (SIP)

Each Priority school (like every other school in Michigan) must develop and annually update a plan for increasing student achievement and dealing with causal factors that resulted in the school placing in the bottom 5% of Michigan's schools. All major stakeholders in the school have input to this plan.

## School Improvement Facilitator (SIF)

SIFs provide support, training, monitoring and continual skill development to school leaders and leadership teams in Title I Priority schools.

## School Support Team (SST)

The school support team, external to the day-to-day operations of the Priority school, provides objective and expert guidance to carry out the process of school change in Title I Priority schools. A school support team is made up of a district representative, a school improvement facilitator, and MSU K-12 specialist.

**Michigan Department of Education**

608 W. Allegan Street

P.O. Box 30008

Lansing, MI 48909

517-373-3324

[www.michigan.gov/mde](http://www.michigan.gov/mde)



College of Education  
Office of K-12 Outreach

